

‘From one or two of my friends there on the occasion of my marriage. You interest me very much, Mr Holmes. I had hardly expected such a narrow head, nor such great development of the bone. Would you have any objection to my feeling it? I confess that I am very interested in the shape of your head.’

‘I suppose, sir, that it was not only to examine my head that you did me the honour to pay me a call here last night, and again today?’

‘No, sir, although I am happy to have had the opportunity to do that as well. I came to you, Mr Holmes, because I recognize that I am not myself a very worldly man, and because I have suddenly met a most serious problem . . .’

Chapter 2 The Baskerville Story

‘I have in my pocket some papers,’ said Dr James Mortimer. ‘They were given into my care by Sir Charles Baskerville, whose sudden death three months ago caused so much excitement in Devonshire. He took these papers very seriously, and his mind was prepared for just such a death as, in the end, he suffered.’

Holmes stretched out his hand to take them. I looked over his shoulder at the yellow paper and the writing, faint now with age. At the top was written: ‘Baskerville Hall’, and under that, in large, untidy figures: ‘1742’.

‘It appears to be a statement of some sort.’

‘Yes, it is an account of an event which is well known in the Baskerville family. With your permission, I will read it to you.’

Dr Mortimer turned the papers towards the light, and read the following strange old story:

‘‘There have been many statements about the origin of the Hound of the Baskervilles. But as I can follow my family line directly back to Sir Hugo Baskerville, and as I was told the story

by my father, who was also told it by his father, I write this account fully believing that things happened just as I shall describe them. Learn from this story not to fear the results of the past, but to be careful in the future, so that our family – which has suffered so badly in the past – may not suffer again.

‘‘Know then that about 1650 Baskerville Hall was owned by Hugo Baskerville. He was a wild and cruel man. It happened that he fell in love with the daughter of a poor man who owned some land near the Hall. But the young girl always avoided him, because she feared his evil name. So when her father and brothers were away from home, this Hugo, with five or six of his bad and lazy friends, went secretly to the farm where she lived and carried off the girl. When they brought her to the Hall, she was locked in an upstairs room, while Hugo and his friends sat down below and started drinking, as was their custom. The poor girl upstairs was nearly driven mad with fear by the singing and shouting and swearing which came up to her from below. And in her fear she did something that might have frightened the bravest and most active man; with the help of the thick climbing plant which covered (and still covers) the wall, she climbed from near the roof down to the ground, and ran towards her home, which was three miles away across the moor.

‘‘Some time later Hugo found that the cage was empty and the bird had escaped. Then he became like a human devil. He ran down the stairs into the dining hall, jumped onto the great table, scattering the cups and dishes, and shouted to all his drunken friends that he would give up his body and soul to the Powers of Evil that same night if he could catch the girl. He ran from the house, calling to his servants to get his horse ready, and to let out the hounds. He gave the hounds a piece of cloth from the girl’s torn clothing so that they could find and follow her smell. Then he rode after them at full speed over the moor in the moonlight. For some time the drinkers stood still. But then their dull brains